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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000043

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GR](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: STATUS OF TURKISH POLICY ON ECUMENICITY QUESTIONED
FOLLOWING GREEK PM VISIT

REF: A. ISTANBUL 0038

[B](#). 07 ISTANBUL 0664

Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Ecumenical Patriarchate senior advisor Metropolitan Meliton described Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis' 23 - 25 January visit to Turkey as "significant" and believed Prime Minister Erdogan was sincere when he told his Greek counterpart that he is "evaluating" the issue of re-opening Halki Seminary. He did not know, though, how to interpret PM Erdogan's comments concerning the ecumenicity of the Patriarchate, specifically, that it is an "internal matter" for Orthodox Christians. Previous comments and behavior suggest it could be a significant policy statement that would represent a positive shift in favor of the Patriarchate. Regardless, Meliton expected the visit to contribute to further warming of Greek-Turkish relations. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Ecumenical Patriarchate senior advisor Metropolitan Meliton told us on January 28 that the first official trip of a Greek Prime Minister to Turkey in 49 years (ref A) was "significant." Likely alluding to the absence of explicit concessions by either party, he characterized Greek PM Karamanlis' January 23 - 25 visit as "not great, but good." Because things had gone well in Ankara, he proffered, the trip should contribute to the overall positive progress of relations between the two countries.

[1](#)3. (C) Concerning Karamanlis' demand that the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Halki Seminary be permitted to re-open, Meliton stated he believed in PM Erdogan's sincerity when he reportedly responded the GOT is "evaluating" the issue. Meliton noted the Patriarchate is simply waiting for the government to announce its decision. He did not know, however, how to interpret PM Erdogan's remark that the "ecumenicity" of the Patriarchate is an internal matter for Orthodox Christianity. If the Prime Minister meant this is an internal "problem" because Orthodox Christians did not universally recognize the Patriarchate as the first among equals, Meliton believed Erdogan would be incorrect in drawing such a broad conclusion. However, if the Prime Minister meant this is an internal "subject" for Orthodox Christianity and that the government should not interfere, than this is a positive development and Turkish officials should permit the Patriarchate to use the term "Ecumenical."

[1](#)4. (C) Underscoring that PM Erdogan's ecumenicity comment is subject to interpretation, mainstream Hurriyet's Mehmet Yilmaz asked in a January 26 op-ed whether the remark represents a change in policy toward the Patriarchate's ecumenical status. With aslight twist on the intra-Orthodox

disagreement scenario Meliton described, Yilmaz wondered whether the government would agree to recognize the Patriarchate's ecumenicity if the Christian Orthodox world were able to agree on the primacy of the Archbishop of Constantinople. Meliton remained optimistic however, pointing to more explicit comments PM Erdogan and FM Babacan had made in the past on the subject as evidence that the government had possibly shifted its position to one of non-interference. According to Meliton, the Prime Minister was quoted as saying a year ago that Sultan Fatih Mehmet the Conqueror accepted the ecumenicity of the Patriarchate because he had self confidence, and that Turkey (today) also has this same self-confidence.

15. (C) Comment. Yilmaz' unlikely interpretation aside, PM Erdogan's ecumenicity remark is potentially a very significant positive development for the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Ever since the Higher Court of Appeals in June 2007, stated the Patriarchate is not ecumenical, we've sought to understand how the government interpreted the Court's statement and get assurances that the statement would not be used against the Patriarchate. The Istanbul Governorship was the first to tell us that the Court had simply made a non-binding "statement" (vice a binding ruling) and that the government's policy had not changed (ref B). This is the first time we've heard the Prime Minister say as much. In fact, his wording is potentially exactly in line with what Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew argues: ecumenicity is not a political issue for the GOT to recognize or not recognize. Bartholomew only wants the GOT to not interfere with his ability to administer the Patriarchate ecumenically, as was the case in 2004 when officials chose not to respond to the appointment of four non-Turkish citizens to the Patriarchate's Holy Synod. End comment.

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